

“This just isn’t the same...” “This doesn’t feel right...” “This is precisely zero fun...” “This is just annoying...” That’s basically an iteration of what I sounded like for three solid hours on Friday morning, because I just kept staring at my computer completely *annoyed*. I mean, I know, I know, commercialism and capitalism and people are crazy, but honestly, I love Black Friday, and this year just did not cut it. I tried, desperately, to make the online shopping experience feel like I wanted it to, but all I kept thinking was...I wish this was different. I wish things were like they were. Never in my life did I ever think I would find myself longing for the interminable process of standing in line at Kohl’s, that inevitable feeling of watching that line wind around the entire store and dejectedly getting in place and going, well...now we wait. And yet, that’s exactly what I missed on Friday. I missed lines and people and while my bank account was happy, I missed the oh I’ll randomly pick this up for this person because it’s cute and it just happens to be right here where I find myself standing in line so why not just throw it in my bag.

I know we have all had those moments this year, where the weight of just how much has changed, how much is different sinks in, but Friday morning was one of those for me. I looked at my adorable stack of Christmas masks that one of my friends sent me and I just wanted to be like

bah humbug, I am tired. I want to shop and wait in line and complain that I'm too warm and haul in the eight billion bags that filled my trunk and have it finally feel like Christmas, even when in the back of my head I would yell at myself a little bit because it shouldn't take shopping for it to feel like Christmas. All morning I just kept fighting off the feeling of...I wish things were just like they were last year...

It's a hard feeling to fend off, particularly when we've basically been fending off that feeling for nine months at this point. Let's face it...this year has been nothing of what we had intended or planned it to be, and while it's true, there are positives that have come from this year, insights, different brands of hopefulness, there's just also been a lot of hard, and a lot of longing for things to just go back to how they once were, for this stretch of things to be done so we can just figure out where we go next. It's that feeling of...we have worn our masks and kept our distance and generally, hopefully, done what we were supposed to, so can't we just go back to how it was? At least for Christmas...at least for this time of year...can't this one thing, Advent, preparation, the most wonderful time of the year feel like it's supposed to without all the other junk hanging around?

I'm not aiming to bum us all out, trust me, but it's a reality we're all familiar with, honestly...it's a reality almost everyone is familiar with no

matter the time or place you live in, no matter whether you're living in a pandemic or in some other brand of the world has gone crazy limbo, which is where the Israelites find themselves in our first lesson this morning.

Waiting. Waiting and growing ever more impatient and just wishing and wishing and wishing for things to go back to how they were, and frankly they're starting to get a little peeved and so they unleash their frustration a little bit and well, they sound a little bit like us as we continue to sit here in this the year of our Lord 2020.

The Israelites have been doing this exile thing for what, in their opinion, is long enough. They've been away from home, stuck in Babylon, separated from everything they know, with no sense of normalcy for years. There's actually a whole new generation of Israelites who have only known exile as their life, and frankly they're just...done. They're done feeling alone, they're done feeling homesick, they're done feeling like they don't know what's going to happen next, they're done feeling like God has abandoned them, they're done feeling like they've learned their lesson with no change on the horizon, and so they finally give vent to *all of those feelings* in one fell swoop.

God...it is long past time that you showed up and did your God thing. Even if it means coming with a little fire, brimstone, and heaven tearing

earthquaking, just *get here already!!* We're tired. We're lonely. And frankly, we're annoyed, because that's who you used to be! You used to be the God that just showed up, that made yourself known, that called us to account but also showed us forgiveness. Now though, it's like you've forgotten who we are, you've forgotten we're your people. Now, it just feels like you're hiding from us, and frankly, it's really frustrating. We're ready for things to go back to normal, we're ready for things to go back to how they were. We've learned our lesson. Now please, please just show up and be God and let's move on to the next phase. We know, we know we stopped calling on you and so we get it, maybe you've stopped listening, but now, well, we're calling on you...so stop sending us to voicemail, and let's figure this thing out so that it can all just stop feeling so...icky and awful.

It's like everything has finally sunk in for them...like, we've been doing this long enough so maybe the light bulb can go off and if we say the right things, and if we finally get our act together, things can go back to the way they were. I mean, honestly, that feeling should sound a little familiar, right? We've done everything we're supposed to so how are we facing another potential lockdown?! How does this whole pandemic thing somehow feel worse and more stressful now nine months later than it did back in March?! How are we right back where we started?! And well...if

we're honest, we know the answer, right? Because we haven't really done everything we're supposed to, at least not all the time. We've gotten cavalier with our safety and the safety of others. We've cut corners and taken risks and now that we see the full consequences of that we're frustrated and annoyed and want things to change.

The Israelites were the same way. We thought exile would only last a little while. And I mean, we were sad initially and took it seriously, but dang it is just going and going and going and so maybe somewhere along the way we kind of just laid back and went back to doing our own thing, but now, well forty years is a long time...and so we're back to being ready to do and say what we need to do, and if we're willing to do that then God you need to do the same thing. Get on board with the program! Let's end this and get on with it, so we can get back to normal! They want change on their terms. They want God to act on their terms. And it isn't necessarily because they've changed, it's because they're tired...

We do this in our lives, and not just when we're in the midst of pandemics. We do this a ton in our faith lives, we do this a ton during Advent, honestly. It's like, oh! Christmas is right around the corner, so we need to very much be thinking about God and Christ's birth and what that means and even if we're kind of ambivalent about it the other eleven months

of the year, well, we're ready now! It feels a little bit like that meme that sometimes goes around that's like, "Vader is coming...look busy." We're like, oh Jesus is coming, we should probably start caring! When we all kind of know what's going to happen come January...we'll sink back into our regular rhythms, and life will get busy and we'll sit back again until next December and we'll start the whole cycle over again.

There's a reason Jesus tells the disciples over and over again to keep awake, to remain vigilant, because he knows the instincts of God's people. Being God's people all the time can be exhausting. Showing that much love, that much care, that much attention all the time? It stretches our hearts to their limit. Some days we want to be like, you know what, Jesus, give me like a fifteen minute heads up before you come back and then I'll pray and care for the poor and speak up about injustice, but in the meantime, just let me live my life! And yet, so much of what Jesus came to try and show us was that our old normal, our old way of living, that's not something we should want to go back to. We shouldn't want to go back to a life that is sometimes characterized by selfishness and greed, by indifference and complacency. Jesus tells the disciples they need to keep awake, because the life he has shown them and guided them into is one that needs constant attention. And the people he has called them to serve need their hearts and

their focus, not just when they're feeling like it, but all the time, because that is the way of the kingdom of God. It is a life lived with attentiveness to the world around us, to the needs of others, and to the beating heart of creation.

We shouldn't need to be reminded of that once a year...the things that we are called to be attentive to, the things we're called to care about. It should be a fundamental part of who we are, all the time. The reality is, nothing is going to be the same after this year, and maybe...maybe that's ok. Maybe at the end of all of this, we might just take a second to realize that this was the wake up call we needed, one that turns our hearts back to who we were created to be, back to who God calls us to be, who we desire and long to be. Maybe we finally decide that we're done being God's people when we think someone is looking. Maybe we decide that it's just who we are. Maybe we finally decide that it's time to stop demanding God show up when and how we want and remember that God is still here, all around us, but we're sometimes blind to the presence around us, because we're so focused on everything else. Christmas is coming...and that does require a certain attention and focus, but the reality is, every day that we live is a day closer to Christ coming and so honestly, every day should be lived like Christmas is right around the corner. December or August, Covid or no Covid, we keep awake...because the world needs our attention. **AMEN!!!**